

8861

ACTION

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April 3, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: Special Prisoner of War Committee

Secretary Laird has sent you a memorandum (Tab B) objecting to the establishment of a Special Prisoner of War Committee within the White House. He wishes to maintain the existing machinery and coordination procedures for handling prisoner of war matters, and also still favors his proposal for naming the Vice President as principal authority on policy issues. He believes that the prisoners issue is so crucial that "we will need authority and influence that can only be supplied at the highest levels of Government" to bring movement on it.

Secretary Laird also believes that we should press ahead with detailed planning for the Presidential emissary on prisoners of war, and that this individual should be encouraged to proceed with his contacts at the earliest possible date.

At Tab A is a memorandum from you to Secretary Laird pointing out that the establishment of the Special Prisoner of War Committee was undertaken as a result of the President's directive that such a body be organized within the White House to focus upon the operational aspects of the prisoner of war problem; the intention, however, was not to supplant existing machinery but to work along with it. (At Tab C is your memorandum to the President on this subject for reference purposes.) The memorandum to Secretary Laird also points out that planning activity on the Presidential emissary is proceeding. It suggests that if Secretary Laird's concerns over the Special Prisoner of War Committee remain, he may wish to communicate directly with the President.

RECOMMENDATION:

OSD review completed. RIF

That you sign the memorandum to Secretary Laird at Tab A.

Atts.

NSS review completed.

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JHH:pmh 4/3/70

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MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Special Prisoner of War Committee

I have your memorandum of March 31 expressing your opposition to the creation of a Special Prisoner of War Committee. The Committee was established at the direct behest of the President and reflects his strong belief that an action-oriented body should be created within the White House to deal with the prisoners of war issue. It is not intended that this group supplant existing machinery, but rather that it consider and coordinate measures, both in the overt and clandestine field, which can put pressure on Hanoi. It would thus work along with existing machinery.

I of course appreciate the considerations of priority and policy direction which you have outlined. In this respect, planning is presently underway on a priority basis on the activities of the Presidential emissary on prisoners of war.

Should your concerns about the Special Prisoner of War Committee remain, you may wish to communicate directly with the President on this subject.

Henry A. Kissinger

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JHH:pmh 4/3/70

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

31 MAR 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY
AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: Special Prisoner of War Committee

I have your memorandum of March 24 regarding the establishment of a special prisoner of war committee. For a number of reasons, I am opposed to creating such a mechanism at this time.

In my memorandum to you dated 23 August 1969, I reviewed some of the recent history of the Government's handling of prisoner of war matters, the way we are organized in the Department of Defense to handle PW affairs, coordination with State, and so forth. My conclusion was that, while our internal Defense and State working organizations and relationships on prisoner matters seemed generally adequate, there was a distinct need for policy attention and direction at the highest level. I recommended that the Vice President serve as principal authority on policy issues. I believe these judgments remain valid today.

It is doubtful that our objectives in the PW field would be well served by the creation now of a formal interagency group designed to exercise guidance and control over the operational aspects of prisoner of war affairs. Such operations can be effectively handled by the existing machinery and through normal coordination.

It is my belief that the U.S. Government must assign the highest priority to obtaining the release of all U.S. prisoners held by the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, and the Pathet Lao, as well as a complete accounting of those who are missing in action. Certainly we must continue to stress the humanitarian requirements, including the release of sick and injured prisoners, identification of men held, and the free exchange of mail. However, the passage of time dictates the need to press for the release of our men, some of whom have now been prisoners for five and even six years in one case.

The pressing need, in my opinion, is for continuing policy direction on crucial major issues, which could not be supplied by the interagency group contemplated in your memorandum. I have in mind the need for decisions on such difficult questions as the relationship of our PW efforts to the over-all Vietnamization program, to future

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US force levels in Vietnam, and to the priorities of the South Vietnamese Government. In mounting and carrying out future initiatives designed to bring real movement on the prisoner of war issue, we will need authority and influence that can only be supplied at the highest levels of Government.

Moreover, assuming the appointment of a special Emissary on the prisoner question, planning for the Emissary's efforts will require careful coordination at a high level. The Defense and State Departments will, of course, be prepared to offer specific suggestions regarding itinerary, contacts, and general approach, both public and diplomatic. I believe we should press ahead now with detailed planning for the Presidential Emissary, who should be encouraged to proceed with his contacts at the earliest possible date.

As we move ahead with additional troop redeployments from Southeast Asia, the frustrations of the prisoners' families will increase. This situation emphasizes the importance of proceeding with public and private contacts by a personal representative of the President. Such an endeavor will provide some measure of reassurance to the families involved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "John F. Kennedy", written in a cursive style.~~SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM

8003

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

ACTION

March 13, 1970

SECRET/SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Special Prisoner of War Committee

I have been considering various ways of setting up the action-oriented team on prisoners of war which you wish to have established within the White House, and believe that the most effective and efficient way to accomplish this purpose is to set up a committee composed of members of all Departments and Agencies concerned with the POW issue to meet regularly under the chairmanship of a member of my staff. In this way White House direction can be assured without the administrative problems connected with creating an entirely new office within your staff, and new ideas and concepts can be put forward without running up against the frequently stultifying inter- and intra-agency clearance process.

This committee, which could come into existence almost immediately, could be created by calling on each of the Departments and Agencies now concerned with POW affairs to nominate one or two representatives, depending on the extent to which it has been involved in this particular aspect of our operations. For example, Defense might nominate two people, one from the office of the Special Assistant to the Joint Chiefs for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities and one from ISA; State one individual who has experience in POW affairs; CIA one person familiar with Southeast Asian operations; and USIA one person with psychological warfare background. Support staff would be supplied by the NSC.

The charter of the committee would be to function both in the overt and clandestine field in all ways which could put pressure on Hanoi. Overtly, it would assure that a hard-hitting series of statements on POWs is drafted for the Paris talks, it would consider contacts with foreign governments as appropriate, and it would coordinate efforts to achieve inspections of POW facilities, exchange of mail and packages, release of name lists, and release of sick and wounded POWs. This would, of course, be in accordance with consultations with State and Defense. On the clandestine side, it would

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undertake to exercise jurisdiction over the various efforts of CIA and Armed Forces units to free our POWs. It might also see that contacts are maintained with "peace" groups which have opened up some degree of access to POWs in North Vietnam. It would propose and regulate psychological operations of both a "black" and overt nature.

I have drafted a memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence and the Director of USIA (Tab A) which informs them of your decision to implement the plan described above and directs them to nominate personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That you approve the plan outlined above.

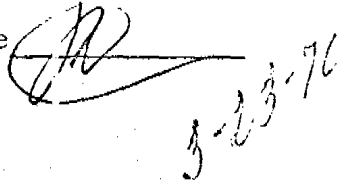
Approve



Disapprove

That you authorize me to issue the memorandum at Tab A.

Approve



Disapprove

Att.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SECRET/SENSITIVE

March 24, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
THE DIRECTOR, U.S. INFORMATION AGENCY

SUBJECT: Special Prisoner of War Committee

1. The President has decided that efforts on behalf of our prisoners of war in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos might be made more effective if an interagency committee is set up to exercise guidance and control over all activities, both overt and covert, which are undertaken in connection with the POW issue. He has therefore directed that a Special Prisoner of War Committee be established under the chairmanship of a member of the National Security Council Staff, which will meet regularly for the purposes just described.

2. Each of the Departments and Agencies now concerned with POW affairs should nominate representatives to serve on the Special POW Committee as follows:

- Department of Defense: one representative from SACSA and one from ISA;
- Department of State: one officer with experience in POW affairs;
- CIA: one person familiar with Southeast Asian operations;
- USIA: one person with psychological warfare background.

3. The charter of the Special POW Committee will be to consider and supervise measures, both in the overt and clandestine field, which can put pressure on Hanoi. Overtly, it will assure that a series of hard-hitting

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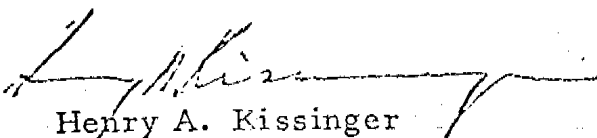
SECRET/SENSITIVE

-2-

statements on POWs are drafted for the Paris talks, it will consider contacts with foreign governments as appropriate, and it will coordinate efforts to achieve inspections of POW facilities, exchange of mail and packages, release of name lists, and release of sick and wounded POWs. This will be in accordance with consultations with the Departments of State and Defense. On the clandestine side, it will undertake to exercise jurisdiction over the various efforts of CIA and Armed Forces units to free our POWs. It might also see that contacts are maintained with "peace" groups which have opened up some degree of access to POWs in North Vietnam. It will propose and regulate psychological operations of both a "black" and overt nature.

4. Actual operations agreed upon by the Special POW Committee will be carried out by the Departments or Agencies most directly concerned.

5. The suspense date for action on this directive is March 27, 1970.


Henry A. Kissinger

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